Laying that Damned Book Aside? Evaluating the Digital *Doctor Faustus*

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Good Angel

O Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap Gods heavy wrath upon thy head,
Read, read the scriptures, that is blasphemy.

Evil Angel

Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art,
Wherein all nature's treasury is contained:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements. Exeunt.

(Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 69-76. The Perseus Project, *Tragedie of Doctor Faustus (B text)* (ed. Hilary Binda))

I n her introduction to *Electronic Text: Investigations in Method and Theory*, Kathryn Sutherland asks if there is

a real danger that the scholar-worker, toiling for years in the remote regions of the library stacks in the hope of becoming expert in one small field, will be transformed by the computer into the technician, the nerdy navigator able to locate, transfer, and appropriate at an ever faster rate expert entries from a larger set of information that he/she no longer needs or desires to understand.

(Sutherland 10)

Her inquiry is based on an issue that still plagues many scholars: with quick access to so much digitized information, how do we evaluate what we still need and desire to understand? Of course, her question implies that evaluating printed information is an evaluation based on less access and therefore a smaller set of information, and evaluating printed information is not an uncomplicated issue; it is one which scholars reconsider constantly. One such group--literary scholar-workers--may spend years 'toiling' over similar versions of a printed text in order to produce a single representative edition. In the case of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragedie of Doctor Faustus*, for example, there is no extant manuscript, nine versions were printed between 1604 and 1631, and the first appeared almost nine years after Marlowe's death. Those that appeared in 1604, 1609, and 1611 are similar and are collectively known as the A-text. The 1616, 1619, 1620, 1624, 1628, and 1631 versions are also similar and known as the B-text. Which one should a reader or scholar consult?

Remarkably different, the A- and B-texts have inspired an extensive amount of critical commentary and scholarly editors since W.W. Greg appear to agree on one thing: neither the A- nor the B-text is considered wholly representative of Marlowe's original work. Still, scholars have attempted to represent what one most needs and desires to understand in an edition of *Doctor Faustus*. Evaluating a digital edition of *Doctor Faustus* can not—and should not—be based on exactly the same process even though it may be based on the same set of problems inherent to the *Doctor Faustus* work. Standards by which one may evaluate the digital *Doctor Faustus* are present in three very different digital versions of the work: The Perseus Digital Library edition (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>), Early English Books Online (EEBO-TCP) collection (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>, and the *Versioning Machine* (<http://mith2.umd.edu/products/ver-mach/index.html>) electronic publishing environment.

To date, the two most critically important print editions of *Doctor Faustus* are W.W. Greg's *Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' 1604-1616: Parallel Texts* (1950) and David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen's *Doctor Faustus A- and B-texts (1604, 1616)* published in 1993. Editors of print editions have sought to ameliorate the *Faustus* copy-text problem by printing both the A and B texts together in one volume. Greg lays out parallel versions on facing pages while Bevington and Rasumussen print the texts sequentially, A before B. Certainly, these print editions still pose some editorial complexities. In order to construct his facing-page arrangement, Greg had to "compromise" Marlowe's representation of the original plays.[1] In the original printings, a scene that appears early in the first act of the A text may not appear until much later in the B text, but since Greg was attempting to show parallel versions of the play, he moved those scenes to the same location in each play to facilitate that comparison (Greg 151). Likewise, Rasmussen and Bevington admit that while they "try to give the A- and B-texts straight," they "do, to be sure, adopt a few B-text readings in [their] A-text and vice-versa when corruption seems unmistakable" (Bevington and Rasmussen n. pag.). Both Greg and Bevington claim they seek to represent each text as it was "originally" intended but the print medium requires that these editors "compromise" their intentions.

Electronic versions of *Doctor Faustus* in EEBO-TCP and The Perseus Project allow for types of research that may have been unthinkable with traditional print resources. EEBO-TCP provides greater access to the first printings of *Doctor Faustus* with facsimiles and searchable text. Facsimiles of the original printings allow users to see bibliographical codes that a modernized printing or a digital transcription might otherwise fail to present. The Perseus edition edited by Hillary Binda

provides access to electronic tools for textual analysis. In Binda's edition of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* the user may compare Binda's modernized spellings with Greg's A- and B-texts. The user also has access to one of Marlowe's primary sources, *The English Faust Book* of 1592 by P. F. Gent. By providing the user simultanesou access to both versions, Binda fulfills her main objective, which is not to favor either version, an advantage that is replicated in the EEBO-TCP experience where the reader can choose to read any available printing in any order.

While the EEBO-TCP and the Perseus editions facilitate a new perspective of *Doctor Faustus*, they lack a level of editorial annotation that print scholarly editions of *Faustus* have usually included. Without annotations, unmediated facsimiles of Renaissance texts like those offered by EEBO-TCP may be considered misleading. As John Lavagnino points out, "a facsimile of an early edition may have more 'errors' in it than a modern reprint," but without the Renaissance reader's "awareness of the degree of uncertainty in the text; our corrected modern editions make it look like we're quite certain about what the text is supposed to say" (Lavagnino 67). The Perseus edition is problematic for other reasons. Binda chooses Greg's parallel edition "as a model for linking lines, passages and scenes between the two texts," but Binda also claims she does not want to indicate a preference for the A- or B-texts (Binda par. 14). Yet, as previously argued, Greg's paralleled version (which provides the basis of her encoded text) evinces a clear bias for B, making her claim untenable. Further, both projects use the TEI XML encoding standard — a standard that requires a substantial level of editorial decision-making, yet neither EEBO-TCP or Perseus discuss these choices, thereby abstracting another level of editorial influence. That basic aspects of textuality engendered by text selection or metadata encoding might not be declared by the editor of an electronic Faustus appears to elide an adequate level of accountability.

The Versioning Machine is an environment that facilitates displaying and comparing multiple versions of texts. The *VM* environment could be particularly productive in examining the *Doctor Faustus* text, because, as Schreibman notes, the text may be "freed from the spatial limitations of the codex" and could provide readers with the "reconstruction of [the] text's instantiations over time" (Schreibman "Computer-mediated texts" 291). Instead of simply providing access to facsimiles, this environment could provide access to a new perspective on the textuality of *Doctor Faustus* by including introductory material and traditional annotations plus "manipulatable images of the witness to be viewed alongside the diplomatic edition" (Schreibman *The Versioning Machine* 101). The *VM* environment could also provide access to sequential *or* parallel readings plus relevant images from first printings *and* annotations that discuss pertinent editing issues.

Of course, the *Versioning Machine*—like other electronic tools—is not without its limitations. For example, subtle variations that appear on the printed page (such as font or case changes, line numbers, act and scene numbers, etc.), must be 'hardcoded' or made explicit to the structure in the XML version, an encoding practice that is not encouraged by the TEI standard. Indeed, in order to elucidate editorial practices, the XML must account for all variations—even seemingly of the most diminutive significance—a cumbersome encoding process that may or may not yield a critically productive result for the user. Further, the encoding encouraged by the *Versioning Machine* documentation ("parallel-segmentation") yields the same problems with *Faustus* that Greg faced; if a large section of "parallel" content appears in different locations in the text, the *Versioning Machine* cannot currently facilitate the HTML representation of that comparison (although changes in the XSLT and CSS could possibly provide alternatives).

It is apparent that our duty as computing humanists is not to evaluate which digital representation we may access or 'appropriate' most easily or which one might answer all our questions about what we most need or desire. Certainly, different scholars use different print versions as means for different ends. Likewise, a scholar may use EEBO-TCP to compare the bibliographic details of *Doctor Faustus* to one of approximately 125,000 other contemporary artifacts or use the very act of encoding an electronic version of *Doctor Faustus* in the *Versioning Machine* to analyze limitations in editing such different versions. The versions of *Doctor Faustus* that appear in EEBO-TCP and the Perseus edition and the relationship a scholar has with these texts in the *Versioning Machine* are different—from print editions and from each other—and they facilitate a different presentation of and relationship to the work. These electronic versions of *Doctor Faustus* should be evaluated on the goals their editors seek to achieve, the particular audiences for which they are intended, and the traditional modes of editorial accountability exemplified by Bevington, Boas, Breymann, Greg, Hunter, and Rasmussen, but they should also be evaluated in terms of the electronic medium.

In conclusion, for digital versions, scholars who do more than "locate, transfer, and appropriate at an ever faster rate expert entries from larger set of information" (Sutherland 10) in the digital environment must rely on the same scholarly pursuits as always: the desire to create new critical knowledge in the field. This knowledge, for a Renaissance text with the particular complexities inherent to *Doctor Faustus*, for example, may be dependent on some traditional editorial practices. After all, a tool like the *Versioning Machine* may provide access to sequential or parallel readings, relevant images from first printings, and annotations that discuss the editing issues at hand in various sections, but the *VM* environment, like print, like all electronic collections and editions, is limited in representing the *Doctor Faustus* work. For scholars the question is not shall

we listen to the good angel and lay that damned book aside or listen to the bad angel and be lord and commander of these elements. The choice, as we know the story goes, is not that simple.

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1. To maintain the parallel representation, Greg admits that he must "compromise" the "typographical arrangement" between the quartos in order to facilitate "the detailed comparison of the texts" (Greg 151).

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